



Intelligence Information Report

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SUBJECT Evacuation, Escape Attempts, Illnesses and Detention of American Prisoners of War

ACQ Vietnam, Saigon (9 September 1970)

SOURCE ☐

FIELD NO. ☐

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Approved for Release

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Summary: American prisoners of war captured in North and South Vietnam were evacuated to central facilities in North Vietnam (NVN) as expeditiously as circumstances permitted. Those captured in South Vietnam (SVN) were evacuated via routes used by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) to infiltrate its units into SVN. One escape attempt became known. North Vietnam valued American POW's as potentially very valuable sources of information. Illnesses suffered by American prisoners of war while in captivity in NVN included cachexia, general fatigue and neurasthenia. Some prisoners, because of their lack of cooperation with the NVN interrogators, were identified as "hard core" although a more appropriate terminology would be "wayward" or "stubborn." End Summary.

1. All Americans captured in SVN were evacuated to NVN as soon as possible, consistent with good security procedures and with the combat situation in each area of SVN. While limited exploitation of American prisoners was permitted in SVN, policy dictated that all Americans be evacuated as soon as local exploitation was concluded. No American prisoners were held in SVN beyond the time needed to exploit them for tactical information.

all captured Americans were evacuated to Hanoi within less than six months after capture.)

2. Local exploitation in SVN, particularly of the more knowledgeable Americans, was conducted by NVA military intelligence representatives who were primarily interested in the protection of local NVA and Viet Cong (VC) facilities and concentrations from Allied attack. This exploitation was concluded as quickly as possible so the prisoner could be evacuated to NVN. Strict accountability procedures existed for each captured American, and no VC/NVA commander wished to assume responsibility for his safety longer than was necessary.

3. American prisoners were evacuated to NVN along the same routes as those used by the NVA to infiltrate its personnel into SVN or to evacuate wounded to NVN. Some Americans, like the VC/NVA wounded, were evacuated by truck from those areas which received supplies from NVN by truck, but most traveled on foot. Empty trucks returning to NVN from the Quang Tri Province area in particular were occasionally used to transport American prisoners to NVN, and vehicles which transported supplies as far south as Kontum Province were also sometimes used. Because truck and train transport was subject to air attack, even in NVN, most prisoners continued their journey in NVN on foot. Fewer VC/NVA ill and wounded were evacuated to NVN from southern SVN than from central and northern SVN.

4. Each captured American was considered both a valuable hostage and a potential source of important information. Accordingly, no VC/NVA commander, given the fluid combat situation in SVN, wished to run the risk of having a captured American escape once the prisoner came under his jurisdiction. Since there were no secure detention facilities in SVN, lower echelons transferred Americans to higher echelons and then to the central level in NVN as promptly as possible.

5. [] was not aware of any escapes or attempted escapes by American prisoners in SVN. Through interrogations, the Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) learned that U.S. pilots had reportedly

been briefed to evade capture if downed over NVN by promptly signalling other aircraft to rescue them or by taking shelter in mountainous areas of NVN. They also had been instructed to seek out shelter in any foreign embassy in Hanoi if this were possible. According to information provided during official briefings, all foreign embassies in Hanoi were intensely interested in the presence of American prisoners in NVN. NVN therefore did not exclude the possibility that the foreign embassies, including Communist bloc embassies, would attempt to smuggle American prisoners out of NVN.

6. While in SVN, [] learned about the attempted escape of two American prisoners in NVN. In late 1967, two American pilots from the U.S. 7th Fleet escaped from Hoa Lo Prison about one month after their capture and after their initial exploitation had been concluded. The prisoners, who had given the impression of being cooperative, were able to break out of the prison during the night while the regular guard was attending a Party meeting. They hid their escape from a substitute guard by placing matting under the bed covers, and the escape was not detected until the following morning. Search attempts, coordinated by the MPS and the MND, were concentrated in the area of the Gia Lam airport because it was believed that the escapees would attempt to steal a plane. Dogs tracked the escapees to the Hong River, and the search was then concentrated in the down-stream direction. Public Security Services and NVA personnel were used from the adjacent districts and provinces to aid in the search.

7. The escapees were accidentally found in a clump of bushes by a group of students in an area north of the Long Bien Bridge, about three kilometers upstream from the point where the dogs had lost their track at the Red River. The two later admitted that they had intended to escape by boat rather than by plane. [] the story had been partially distorted because such an escape was possible from an MND facility but not from Hoa Lo Prison. This was the only escape attempt [] ever heard of by American POW's in NVN. Both the MPS and the MND had reportedly developed special procedures to cope with attempted escapes, but both considered that Americans, because of their appearance, would be easily identified and apprehended. [] any other escapes by American prisoners from NVN would have been staged to serve MPS or MND purposes.)

8. [] all foreign embassies in Hanoi had been placed under special observation. Special attention was paid to the Soviet, Czech and Polish embassies because it was anticipated that the American prisoners might seek shelter or asylum from those countries.

9. In answer to a query, [] speculated that Pho Lu, which was located near Lao Cai, was a logical site for the detention of American prisoners. Pho Lu, the site of several important factories, had been used in 1965 by a relatively large number of Communist Chinese laborers who were detailed to road construction projects in NVN. The Chinese were billeted in a camp located in or near Pho Lu.

[] considered Ba Sao a logical site for the detention of American prisoners because of the location of an MND installation there and because the MND was very active in Ba Sao.

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[] not acquainted with Bat Sat, Coc Mi or Dam Dun and was not aware of any American prisoner of war detention sites at these locations.

10. In Hanoi, American prisoners were held at two separate detention areas. The first was located in the Ly Nam De area, bounded by WJ879265, WJ881264, WJ878259 and WJ881259. The second site was west of the dike at approximately WJ89752465. [] not aware of the location of any American prisoner detention sites at the WJ88322520 location, an area which he considered illogical for reasons of security. All buildings in this area were small and the many streets intersecting the area precluded establishing a maximum security detention facility. However, even prior to the bombing of Hanoi, [] detention facilities where American prisoners were held were relocated on occasion.

11. One of the most prevalent diseases afflicting American prisoners was cachexia. Cachexia referred basically to a deterioration in the physical condition of American prisoners. Their susceptibility to cachexia was attributed to a number of factors relating to the prisoners' state of physical and mental health prior to their capture. Prior to their capture, Americans were accustomed to generous diets and were not plagued with problems of morale. After their capture, although Americans were provided with what was considered a high food ration by North Vietnamese standards, they were denied meats, of which there was a shortage in NVN, and the wide variety of foods to which they had been accustomed. After capture, the Americans suffered from a depressed mental condition brought on by the shock of their incarceration and the interrogation to which they were subjected.

12. As a result, the physical condition of the American prisoners deteriorated because of the poor diet, the confined living conditions, and their depressed mental condition. The poor diet and the confined living conditions usually first caused a feeling of general fatigue. If the prisoners were neglected, the fatigue developed into a more advanced state of physical deterioration called cachexia, or into neurasthenia, which was a more severe or advanced form of physical and mental deterioration. Although prisoners suffering from general fatigue could recover through an improvement in their diet, those suffering from a severe case of cachexia required more than an improved diet, including generous supplies of vitamins, glucose, and blood plasma. Those suffering from neurasthenia were constantly tired, unable to sleep or rest, and in a state of almost total physical exhaustion. They also suffered from severe headaches. Those suffering from cachexia or neurasthenia, if neglected sufficiently long or if the treatment provided was inadequate, ultimately died.

13. Some American prisoners in NVN were described as being "hard core" (trung kien) types. However, neither the MPS nor the MND actually made official use of the "hard core" terminology in making professional reference to uncooperative Americans. The "hard core" expression was used only informally, to describe the intensity of feelings on the part of a certain group of American prisoners. The "hard core" expression was reportedly derived from other American prisoners who, when queried about the stubbornness and lack of cooperation on the part of some Americans, identified them as "hard core" types. Cooperative American prisoners told their interrogators that "hard core" American prisoners were those who had joined the U.S. military establishment (regardless of branch of service) without particular motivation or ideological convictions.

This type of individual was generally considered to have been unruly, boisterous and uncooperative even in his own military unit. [] the origin of the American POW's so described was not limited to any particular military service or region of service but rather included persons from any branch of service or any area of operation. These "hard core" types were generally considered by the interrogators to be adventurous and devoid of any deep-seated patriotic or ideological convictions. []

[] while reference was made to all American prisoners as a collective, discussions nonetheless generally revolved around American pilots, rather than ground force troops, because most important American prisoners in NVN were pilots.)

14. The more accurate terminology used both by the MPS and MND interrogators relating to these "hard core" American POW types was that they were "wayward (cung dau)" or "stubborn (ngoan co)" for the reasons described above. In spite of their lack of cooperation, such American prisoners were considered potentially valuable sources of information and [] suitable for future exploitation.

15. Field Dissem: State USMACV 7th Air Force NAVFORV
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